

A Chance In France

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Summary: What if Sweeney Todd never came back to London? What if Mrs. Lovett escaped to France with another man? And what if they started their life all over again? Sweeney Todd/Les Miserables.

A Chance In France

I decided to write this one chapter story just for personal enjoyment. It's a crossover between two of my favorite movie musicals, Sweeney Todd and Les Miserables. Both movies featured the amazing Helena Bonham Carter and Sacha Baron Cohen, and I thought they called for a crossover. You could say it's AU for both stories, especially for Sweeney Todd, but it still seems in place. Please read and review! :)

She gently fondled her belly as she felt the baby moving.

People might have said she was too old to have a baby now, but she had always known she would one day get a second chance. Back in London, she had miscarried her first child, a fetus of only three months, when she fell down the stairs in her pie shop.

Her life was so different back then. So difficult and complicated. The years with her poor Albert were quiet and peaceful, until the loss of the baby, which had left her deeply traumatized. But after his death, she found herself in crippling debt. She could not pay off the loans no matter how hard she worked. Meat was getting more and more expensive and pie-making was no longer a promising business. She did rent out the apartment over her shop, but that story ended tragically; she had now pushed those memories to some dark secret place in the back of her mind.

Her tenants were a barber and his wife; and he was beautiful. She never forgot his fair skin, his dark hair, his sheer cheekbones, his velvety voice. To her eyes, he was a prince, and she had indeed always been dreaming that she would meet one.

But of course her prince was married to another woman, and very happily so. They had a baby girl, little Johanna, and they were living a life full of joy. And when Judge Turpin stole his wife from him and transported him for life, she cried. Barker his name was. Benjamin Barker.

Despite all the years that had gone by, she still remembered the baby's cry when the judge's men took it from the apartment. Now, with a baby of her own growing in her belly, she was dreaming about her little daughter. She didn't even want to imagine the possibility of it being a boy. She would have a daughter, a pretty little girl, just like Johanna. She would give her a beautiful French name; after all, she was French now. Something romantic, like Azelma, or Eponine.

It was relieving to have a new identity. Of course, she was still Nellie deep inside, but for everyone who knew her, she was named Madame Thenardier. She was now the wife of "the best inkeeper in town", as he proudly referred to himself. Little did the poor villagers know that they weren't married at all, as well as that they weren't French either. They simply happened to share a proficient knowledge of the French language, and an impeccable skill in accents too.

That skill had impressed her when he revealed his first disguise, back in her old pie shop in London. She had seen him a few times in the streets, selling his "miracle elixir" to blithely unaware people. "Adolfo Pirelli, the king of the barbers, the barber of kings" he advertised himself with his crispy Italian accent. His fancy clothes, his raven hair orderly combed and covered in heavy brilliantine, his thin moustache, all proved to be parts of that persona he had created for himself.

He was, perhaps, the only person who ever visited her pie shop, and she soon realized it wasn't because of the food quality. She was indeed making the worst pies in London. Only lard and nothing more was the filling. Her creations were just revolting, all greasy and gritty. Whenever he took a bite, he struggled to smother an urge to vomit. But he kept coming back, and she suspected why. He obviously had developed an interest in her, and she wasn't completely indifferent towards him either.

She knew he was a barber, and she had fallen in love with a barber once. Slowly, he began to remind her of Benjamin, odd as it may sound. He had been gone for so long, and she needed to put her images of him into a living, breathing person again. "Adolfo Pirelli" did not seem unattractive to her. There was a charm about him and she could feel it. So she started to see in him every quality she had once loved in Benjamin Barker.

In one of his regular visits, he decided to reveal himself to her. He told her that he was not really Italian. His name was Davy Collins and he had, as a matter of fact, never left London. He took off his black wig and his moustache and some fuzzy red locks appeared on his head. He ran his fingers through his hair and smiled.

Although he had managed to disguise himself impressively, she had kind of expected it - he did remind her of a young man that had once worked as an assistant to Benjamin, back when he had his barber shop upstairs. It turned out that her suspicions were justified, as he really was that same man. But now she could see there was more to

him. Yes, she enjoyed his company. She was very lonely and Davy surrounded her with a pleasant warmth.

But he was also relieved whenever he was with her. He could be himself for a while and, besides, he did find her very pretty, under her old, tattered clothes, her messy hair and the dark circles under her eyes. She had a beautiful face, distorted perhaps by the years, which hadn't been particularly kind to her, but Davy Collins could still see her glow.

There was a fine line between being friends and lovers, and the two of them would often cross it, either from the one or from the other side. It all began that one night when she asked him where he was staying. He explained that, if the day had been good, he would rent a room in a hotel. If, however, he hadn't sold enough of his "elixir" - which was nothing but a concoction from piss and ink - he would sleep in the streets.

"Poor thing" she thought, and proceeded to ask him if that day had been any good.

"I'm afraid not" he muttered.

She couldn't resist the thought in her head. She shyly invited him to spend the night, and he eagerly agreed.

Soon, he began to spend more and more nights in her house and, occasionally, in her bed too. After years of inactivity, she had a man again. It was refreshing, and he was a skilled lover, she couldn't deny that. Her poor Albert, about thirty years older than her and quite lousy in bed, had been nothing compared to him, but Davy was also not very much like the fantasies she had had about Benjamin. His manners were somewhat rugged, but she finally decided she had better compromise. And she did.

One morning, he was listening to her rant about how Mrs Mooney, owner of a successful pie shop, had suspiciously caused the disappearance of all of her neighbours' cats. Nellie Lovett was certain it was cat meat that she put in the pies. Davy shook his head.

"It ain't no bad idea, my love" he mumbled.

"Y'think I hasn't tried? But I'm telling you, them pussycats is quick" she sighed.

He followed her sigh with one of his own. People weren't buying his elixir and he would soon have no money for food. They would both have to starve to death.

As he undressed her that night, he noticed for the first time the signs of hunger on her body. Her ribs were becoming visible, her arms were now bony. He ran the tips of his fingers on her skin and then through her hair. He studied her as she wrapped her weak arms around him. Her eyes were more sunken, her face paler. As he pulled her thighs apart and slowly slid inside her, he felt them thinner, lighter against his. And he knew that similar changes were taking place in his own body. They wouldn't survive if he didn't come up with a plan.

"You speak French, my love, ain't that right?" he asked her a few

days later.

She looked at him confused. Back when she was a little girl, she had a wealthy aunt who would often take her for walks or buy her gifts. At some point, she had even paid for French lessons, as she reckoned that "it would make her a recherche bride". Young Nellie had a head for languages and she learned it quickly. Those were easy times, happy times, she thought. After her aunt's death, however, her poor family had no one to support them, and, therefore, tried to ensure a good marriage for their daughter. The French lessons ended, and so did the happiest years of her life. She still remembered the language though and, with some practice, she would most likely be able to speak it fluently again. But why did he ask?

"England ain't no longer a place for us. Y' know, changing my identity has already worked once" he said mysteriously.

She raised her eyebrow questioningly.

"This idea popped into me head" he continued. He explained to her how he could take her to France. It wasn't as far away as it might have seemed. There, they could start a new life, a business perhaps. They would be new people and they wouldn't have to worry about anything. Could they live somewhere by the sea? Of course, he answered her question. They would make good money if they set up a smart business - an inn perhaps. It was a time in their lives when they could really use a second chance at everything.

"It's so crazy, it might as well work" she thought. She packed up her few belongings, arranged for someone to buy her house and now, with the little money they got from that sale, they began their journey to France.

They ended up in Montfermeil, a small village in the southern part of the country. To their delight, they found out that the local innkeeper was selling his business for a humiliatingly low price, as he was drowning in debts. She smiled at the thought of her own debts, which she was now free from. They bought it instantly and managed to turn that pathetic little hole into a lively place, open to all the people like themselves; the vermin of the world.

Most inhabitants of the Thenardiers' inn, "The Sergeant of Waterloo", were people with no future. Drunks, beggars, whores, men and women of no morals found shelter in those rooms. And Davy Collins, now under the name "Thenardier", knew that he had once been one of them, a common thief. But now he was so much more. He was the heart of that place, the master of the house. He had made up an entire story about him saving a sergeant's life in the battle of Waterloo, and he very much enjoyed being admired as a hero by the people of Monfermeil, who were naïve enough to not question his stories.

He made sure he could get some money out of every occasion, either with his "reasonable" charges or with his very "thoughtful" cuts on expenses. Cat meat had always seemed a good idea to him, so he regularly used the local cats as sausages. He also never forgot how those perfectly sober men in London had not noticed he was selling them piss, so he thought that drunk men in France would probably not be able to tell the difference either. After all, wine did cost an awful lot.

He also trained his "wife" thoroughly. She was a bloody wonder, that was certain. Thanks to his advice, but also thanks to her natural gift of creativity, she became a very skilled pickpocket. She would often steal small items from their customers and stick them in her bushy hair, now dyed bright blond, or she would dexterously pull banknotes from their pockets and quickly shove them down her luscious bust. He often marveled at her talent - she truly was a match for him.

She had now regained herself; her bones were no longer visible, her hips became curvier, her breasts bigger, her face fuller. She was once again lively, once again alive. And he enjoyed her body now more than ever; he made love to her with passion, and she returned it eagerly. Did she love him deeply? Probably not. Her heart had always belonged to Benjamin. However, since she couldn't have him, "Monsieur Thenardier" was good enough too, despite the fact that he would never become the prince she used to dream of.

The months passed, and now their love-making was bearing fruit. She was pregnant with his child and she was happier than ever. A baby! She would often think of Johanna, Benjamin's daughter. Her mother, Lucy, had always dressed her in pretty clothes, made of fine, pastel-coloured fabrics. Nellie Lovett used to admire the little girl's pink dresses, her yellow ribbons, her little blue hat.

"Madame Thenardier" would have equally beautiful clothes for her own baby - no, no, hers would be even prettier. The business was thriving, she could now afford them. She glanced at the baby crib she had already bought and then returned to the romantic novel she was reading. Once again, she gently caressed her big, round stomach and felt her baby girl moving.

"I love you, little baby" she whispered. A tiny kick came as a response. She smiled. Life in France was simply better.

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